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Leaps in the dark

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Leaps in the dark: 60 years of Nursing Studies at the University of Edinburgh.

An anniversary of note

2016 marks the 60th anniversary of Nursing Studies at Edinburgh University. This important anniversary has been celebrated both within the university (see www.ed.ac.uk/nursing) and during the International RCN Research Society Conference in Edinburgh held in April 2016 to coincide with Nursing Studies' Diamond Jubilee year. HRH the Princess Royal and University of Edinburgh Chancellor, visited Nursing Studies to unveil a plaque to commemorate the Diamond Jubilee and view a poster exhibition which demonstrated how the Department has contributed to nursing excellence, since its inception in 1956.

The role the University of Edinburgh has played in promoting nurse education, research, management and practice in subsequent years is the focus of this *JAN* editorial. A notable Edinburgh alumna, former Professor and Director of the Nursing Research Unit, Professor Alison Tierney was the Editor-in-Chief of this journal and helped to enhance its reputation from 2003 - 2011. Other Edinburgh alumni continue to occupy key roles in the nursing profession – both in the UK and globally – and an alumni conference in November 2016 will allow them to return to Edinburgh and celebrate these successes.

When celebrating important milestones in the history of a such an influential centre of learning it is important to look back and to recognise the contributions by the many individuals who first pushed at the, then, closed doors of the University of Edinburgh to allow nurses to gain a university education. It is also important to recognise and celebrate

nursing's contribution within a university setting of such esteem and standing, long before an all-graduate profession was ever envisaged in the UK.

Post-war ambitions

The roots of the Department of Nursing Studies lie in the post-World War 2 era with the Nurse Tutors' course organised by the Royal College of Nursing Scottish Branch, and the Chair of Public Health and Social Medicine, Professor Crew, who persuaded the then Principal of the University of Edinburgh to allow a Nurse Teaching Unit to be established in the Faculty of Arts. Visionaries such as Francis Crew (Edinburgh) Frazer Brockington (Manchester) and Elsie Stephenson (Edinburgh) who had first-hand experience of emergency and relief work in war-torn Europe, were able to see a role for nurses that went beyond the hospital to provide holistic community care and public health. University education provided the academic and clinical opportunity to deliver such innovative programmes. More generally it was part of a commitment to widening women's access to higher education in the 1950s (Brooks 2011).

So it was in 1956, supported by a grant from the Rockefeller Foundation, the Nursing Studies' Teaching Unit was established. The purpose of this Unit was to bring 'academic rigor' to courses for nurses who were already qualified, specifically tutors or other nurse educators responsible for leading the post-war generation of nursing students. This achievement, unique to Scotland, was considered a landmark in the history of the nursing profession, and resulted in the appointment of Elsie Stephenson as the first nurse member of the faculty of a British University (Allan, 1990, p110) and the first Director of Nursing Studies in Europe. The expressed goal of this first university-based academic Unit was to:

Assist in the provision of a regular supply of teachers, administrators and leaders in the nursing profession with high academic standards of attainment and all the advantages of close contact with the general life of the University throughout the period of their course of study the future of nursing, as Elsie Stephenson saw it, was to become knowledge-based, while retaining the art of caring and the spirit of the service. (Allan, 1990, p108 -9).

Following the establishment of the Teaching Unit, Elsie Stephenson was keen to push ahead and establish an undergraduate nursing programme. She finally achieved her goal in 1960 when four students were enrolled on the first UK undergraduate nursing programme. As she had reported to the university in pursuit of this goal:

It seems that the only way in which the nursing profession can attract and retain candidates of a suitable calibre to become leaders in future years is to provide for them here and now, at undergraduate level, the type of preparation which will meet their intellectual needs as well as professional needs. (Stephenson, 1960, p4).

Stephenson's legacy

The realisation of this ambition relied on the tenacity of Elsie Stephenson. She was a nurse leader of considerable ambition who mobilised support from the Royal College of Nursing, the General Nursing Council and the Matron's Association. Plans were submitted to the university, which in turn were presented to the Secretary of State for Scotland asking his permission to meet with representatives of Education and Health departments. Negotiations

required well-established patterns of nurse training to be changed, as well as finances secured, but finally the first undergraduate degree course in the United Kingdom was created. The much-valued degree-level study was combined with clinical lectures alongside traditionally trained nursing students at the Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh.

Elsie Stephenson's influence on nursing can be seen throughout the 1960's and her role in Edinburgh's story cannot be over-emphasised. Her organisational flair and dynamic enthusiasm were matched by a warm personality which enabled her to develop good working relationships externally, with the NHS and professional bodies, as well as internally within the University's academic community (Weir 1996).

Stephenson had herself studied public health nursing at Toronto University and was involved in family research in Newcastle becoming a member of the Jamieson review of health visitor training and a WHO Advisory Panel member giving advice on health matters world-wide. Hence Stephenson had given up a high profile and successful nursing career on the international stage to come to Edinburgh. With WHO financial support, Stephenson also achieved another first by establishing the International School of Advanced Nursing Studies at Edinburgh to offer administration and/or educational programmes for nursing leaders across the globe (Allan 1990).

Importantly, Elsie Stephenson also brought research-mindedness to bear on the new unit and a research base was set up to deal with the "practical problems of nursing". The first doctorates were completed, the first by a nurse, Audrey John on the work of psychiatric nurses. Margaret Scott Wright (later to become the first Professor of Nursing at Edinburgh, and in the UK), was the second nurse to be awarded a PhD in 1961 entitled *A study on the*

performance of student nurses. These early doctoral awards confirmed that nursing was gradually being seen a researchable subject, and it was soon being argued that nursing research needed to be conducted by those with insight and experience of the profession (Weir, 1996, p15-7). To date there have been 109 PhDs awarded from Nursing Studies at the University of Edinburgh.

Elsie Stephenson died prematurely of cancer (aged 51) and one of the first graduates in Nursing Studies authored her biography (Allan 1990). A memorial fund was also set up and is still used today for a biennial commemorative lecture by eminent nurse leaders on topical and current issues of relevance to nursing. Elsie was succeeded by Dr Margaret Scott Wright who had earlier undertaken research in the Department of Public Health at the University of Edinburgh, and gained her doctorate in 1961. In 1972, she was appointed to the newly established Chair of Nursing Studies at Edinburgh University; the first such Chair in the UK and Europe, confirming the claim of nursing as a distinct discipline and further increasing its status within academia. The established Chair in Nursing Studies has been occupied, since Scott-Wright, by Professor Annie Altschul, Professor Penny Proffit and Professor Kath Melia. The next incumbent is currently awaited. Other universities, such as Manchester, Surrey, Southampton and The University of Wales College of Medicine, soon followed Edinburgh in the mid-late 1960's and early 1970's by establishing academic departments with associated Chairs in Nursing.

During Professor Scott Wright's tenure she secured a grant from the Nuffield Provincial Hospitals Trust in 1971 to employ academic Clinical Nursing Officers who were also lecturers within the department. The Nuffield Project was highly innovative and ambitious and aimed to evaluate patient care, assess the effect of the university education on quality of

care delivered by undergraduate nurses, facilitate information exchange between academic and clinical nursing staff and aimed to help implement nursing research findings. The roles occupied by Edith Notman, Billie Thomson, Dorothy Kilgour and Agnes Jarvis were pioneering: and another first for Edinburgh in terms of creating combined academic / clinical appointments.

These appointments also enhanced relationships between academia and the NHS in Scotland. They were appreciated by the undergraduates, and useful insights were gained about the application of research in clinical settings. Professor Scott Wright also persuaded the Scottish Home and Health Department of the urgent need to provide a locus within which research policy in nursing could be more coherently formulated. Thus, the Nursing Research Unit (NRU) was created with a grant of 150,000 pounds from the Scottish home and Health Department. Its first Director, Dr Lisbeth Hockey, was appointed in 1971. This pioneering unit was the first in a British or European University, and its ongoing research activity was summarised by Professor Alison Tierney, its second Director, in Biennial Reports - until its eventual closure in 1994.

Edinburgh as a centre for undergraduate nursing education

The first undergraduate curriculum accepted by the University was for the academic award of Master of Arts, combined with State Registration, and consisted of the seven courses normally required for an Ordinary Degree at Edinburgh University. These courses were spread over four and a half years, rather than three, to allow for the requisite clinical experience to be gained in university vacations. The fifth half year was devoted solely to

clinical practice and theory so that students could become immersed fully in their roles as hospital staff. This academic achievement marked a move away from the apprenticeship system of nurse training towards a more holistic model of education which other universities such as Manchester, Surrey and University of Wales College of Medicine soon followed.

The numbers undertaking these early degree programmes remained relatively small in the United Kingdom, however, and it was to take until 2013 before degree level education was introduced for all pre-registration nursing students. The leap of faith taken by the University of Edinburgh in the 1950's, therefore, should be recognised as ground-breaking it prepared the way for graduates to enter the nursing workforce having enjoyed a full academic education, and on equal standing with other undergraduates across the University. This liberal model of nursing education was unique and the Nursing Studies students of today still enjoy some of the same benefits. Consistently coming at the top of league tables for student satisfaction, Edinburgh students clearly still enjoy the education offered by the Edinburgh experience.

The model of education offered by Nursing Studies at Edinburgh can be seen to have been highly innovative and students were introduced to novel teaching methods and situations such as a variety of visual aids and role play while being exposed to the philosophical and theoretical concepts underpinning the practice of nursing. Students were encouraged to ask questions and seek answers by being given the means to find the knowledge they needed. The Edinburgh degree course emphasized both hospital based care and community orientated nursing – more so than traditional nurse training - and the District Nursing Certificate was integrated into the undergraduate programme from 1972 - 1984 in collaboration with the Queen's Nursing Institute of Scotland.

These successes, however, did not always come easy. In the early years there was resistance to the graduate course on all fronts with students being greeted with suspicion from the medical profession, as well as by many within nursing itself, who were wary of the university students who had special teaching times and undertook different types of placements. It has been noted that ward sisters and staff nurses sometimes mistrusted the newcomers for their apparent privileges and ambitions (Allan p114-5).

Nevertheless, there was a steady growth in the numbers of students in Nursing Studies which rose from a total of 76 in 1970 to 125 in 1975, (currently there are 131 undergraduate students, and 34 PhD students.) Nursing Studies was eventually integrated into the Social Science faculty in 1963 and the undergraduate programme was extended to offer an Honours Option in the early 1990s. In 2003, with the reconfiguration of the University structures, Nursing Studies became a subject area within the newly formed School of Health in Social Science, itself a school in the College of Humanities and Social Science, one of the three newly created University Colleges. The current Bachelor of Nursing with Honours programme still has, at its heart, the liberal model of nurse education with the first year students choosing outside courses alongside their core nursing courses. In the Honours years the programme also offers a wide range of options allowing students to pursue their interests in specific areas of nursing practice. Students particularly benefit from courses which are based in the staff's research work and clinical interests and expertise.

The experiences of the early Edinburgh graduates have been a source of interest and their career choices were often documented; beginning with surveys in 1969 to follow-up the

graduates' careers with this work continuing by Alison Tierney & Helen Sinclair into the 1980's (Sinclair 1984).

Postgraduate developments

Over the decades Nursing Studies consolidated its academic base. University policy phased out certificate-level courses; as a result, the International School ceased to exist. However, MSc courses, which often attracted overseas students, were created for Nursing Administration and Nurse Education in 1975. Initiatives resulted in new Masters courses being developed which demonstrated an awareness of the emerging trends in health care and the development of specialisms within the nursing profession. Hence Nursing Studies worked with Business Studies to offer a new MSc in Nursing Administration to prepare nurses to fulfil management roles in 1978; this evolved over time and was replaced by an MSc in Nursing and Health Studies in 1991. In 1979, an innovative MSc in Health Education was set up collaborating with the Health Education Board for Scotland. The intention was to appraise students of the UK health education developments, evaluate health education strategies used by the media, and promote the role of the nurse as health educator. Further Master's courses were developed in a range of topics during the 1990's including mental health and cancer care. More recent developments in Masters' degrees offered address the complexity of health care provision in the 21st century, acknowledge the primacy of research and reflect the innovative skills of the current staff.

As courses expanded and student numbers increased, there was a parallel increase in staff. Many Nursing Studies' staff have gone on to influence nurse education in other universities, and worked in other countries to enhance the profession in academic settings - such as

Professors Rosemary Crow and Dr Ruth Schrock. Many have advanced knowledge and practice by research. Professor Annie Altschul for example was distinguished in the field of mental health and Professor Kath Melia became well known for her innovative qualitative research, nursing ethics and sociology writing. Professor Tonks Fawcett currently holds a personal chair in student learning which testifies to the ongoing importance of combined academic and clinical mentorship roles. Professor Pam Smith has led research into the emotional labour associated with nursing and has developed this work at Edinburgh in recent years.

In terms of quality of the education on offer Nursing Studies has topped the league tables for student satisfaction and overall performance in recent years. This is a marker of ongoing excellence and helps to reinforce the high quality of education available to students electing to read Nursing Studies at Edinburgh. Students continue to undertake overseas electives and high numbers of international students come to Edinburgh. Its international profile remains strong and is growing.

In summary, over its 60-year history, Nursing Studies at Edinburgh University has spearheaded the movement from a service-based training model to securing an academic education for nurses, and established the nursing profession's place within academia: the unthinkable became the possible, and then the norm. The pioneers who led Nursing Studies at Edinburgh succeeded in establishing an impressive catalogue of 'firsts' (the first Nursing Chair in the UK as well as the first undergraduate programme) and produced well-equipped graduates to take up posts in clinical service for over six decades. Notably, it has produced individuals who have occupied key positions of influence and leadership in the profession. It

has also undoubtedly played a key part in promoting nursing excellence, and advancing knowledge and research not only within the UK, but also globally.

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